

A

# REVIEW

## OF THE

# STATE

## OF THE

# BRITISH NATION.

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Saturday, April 12. 1707.

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**I**N my last having spoken to the General about Union, Peace, and Acts of Kindness between the Nations, as the only Way to render this Union effectual, and answer the End propos'd in Her Majesty's Speech, I came to lay down the reciprocal Duties between the Nations, and the mutual Duties, which now lie upon them one to another; and these I have brought down to four Heads.

1. Such as respect Religion.
2. Civil Peace.
3. Commerce.
4. Government and Constitution.

Of these I am now to speak, and I begin with the Matter of Religion; because 'tis there, that the Enemies to the general Good seem to place the Hopes they have of a Breach between these Kingdoms.

This Island has been miserably embroil'd upon this Head, for now above 170 Years; Infinite Feuds and Mischiefs have been its constant Case, the Inveteracy of Parties, the Animosity of the People, the Blood, the Ruin, the Devastations and Wars, occasion'd by this one Dispute, are incredible, and it would require a large Volume, but to give due Abridgments of the Matters of Fact.

From the Reign of *Henry VIII.* and the first broaching the Dispute about his Wife, the whole Kingdom of *England* has been divided and subdivided to a Degree hardly to be express'd; and tho' I must acknowledge, GOD's Providence has wonderfully produc'd Order out of these Confusions, and Good out of all this Evil, yet a View both of the Confusions themselves, and the wonderful Connections of Providence, in issuing them,

them, as I say, in his Glory and the publick Good ; as it will be a very pleasant Observation to any, that think it worth their while to regard the Works of their Master, so I hope to bring it down so directly to the Case before me, as that those, who please to read it diligently, shall not fail to see something, of what Heaven directs to now, by what it has directed to on the like Occasions.

I shall not examine here, what the Principles were, which first mov'd King *Hen. VIII.* to scruple his Marriage with Queen *Katherine of Spain*, after cohabiting with her 18 Years or more ? It is not material to my Purpose, whether the Motion began in the Head or the Tail, whether a pure Principle of Conscience and meer religious Scruple, as he himself pretended, or *Reason of State*, as the *Politicians* pretended, he having no Son by her, and likely to have no more Children, and the State of the World at that Time particularly making a Masculine Government in *England* very necessary ; the House of *Austria* and of *Valois* being then very powerful, and headed by two Martial and Famous Princes, *Ch. V* and *Francis I.* Or whether it proceeded from a baser Cause, as the *Roman* Priests gave out, and still perswade us, I mean an immoderate Appetite, Desire of Change, and the like.

'Tis evident, the first Pretence serv'd his Turn best, and had the best Arguments to be brought to support it, since she had been his elder Brothers Wife, which it was known, would generally be condemn'd as unlawful.

Be this as it will, Conscience was made the Pretence, and all the Men of Conscience, almost over the World, were call'd upon to give their Opinion about it ; the Messages, the Debates, the Messengers, and their Management in almost all the Universities, Courts, and Councils in *Europe*, to discussing this Point, are to be seen in the first Volume of the Bishop of *Sarum's* History of the Reformation, to which I refer.

I do not begin this Abridgement of History barely to acquaint the Reader of the Past, for Abundance of Authors have done that already, but for the necessary Observations which I shall find, as I go along, to

edifie and divert the Mind ; and this is the first.

After the various discussing the Article of the King's Marriage in foreign Courts, it seem'd, that nothing so much upheld the QUEEN's Plea for the Lawfulness of it, as the Pope's Dispensation, which the *Casuits* on that side insisted on.

Now the King being secretly resolv'd, if possible, to get out of the QUEEN's Arms, and finding the Supremacy of the Pope over him, both a Cheque to his haughty Temper, and Bar to the Prosecution of his Design.

Wise and invisible Providence, who acts by secret and unaccountable Influences on the Minds of Men, made this very Spirit or Temper of the King, a thing otherwise very tyrannical and hateful both to GOD and Man ; the Means to overthrow the Dominion first, and the Reputation next, of the Popish Regale in this Nation, and so laid the first Embrio or Foundation-Scheme of the Protestant Reformation, which we now enjoy.

To make this more clear, 'tis needful to take the Historical Part up again—— The King finding the Authority of the Pope's Dispensation, the chief Bar by which he was held down to the Grindstone, and that Marriage pin'd upon him, which he found, he could otherwise have master'd his own Way——Resolves next to question the Power, the Pope had to dispense with the direct Commands in the Word of GOD.

This indeed was a Subject, which gave the King Room enough to fall out with the See of *Rome*, and all the Protestants declar'd in his Favour, but the King, who was no Protestant, nor much of any thing else, as to Principle, would not immediately run that Length neither.

But as the cunning Management of the Popish Party held the King in long Suspense, and the QUEEN, who had appeal'd to the Pope, insisting on her Pleas ; the King, wearied and impatient with the Vexation and Delays of the Papal See, sets his Politics to work, and resolves at one Stroke, both to end the tedious Affair by his own Authority, and at the same time to free himself from the Bondage of the Pope.

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This was the famous Transaction of renouncing the Pope's Supremacy in *England*, which, diminishing his Reputation with his Authority, gave the first Blow to Popery; and Queen ANNE, who succeeded Queen *Katherine*, being a Favourer of the Protestants, the Reformation began to show it self, the Court countenancing the first Shineings of the Light of Truth, and the King's Circumstances qualifying him particularly to further it, tho' without any real Affection to it, as appear'd by his putting several to Death for it, as particularly the

famous *Prætor* Martyr of the Reformation in *Lambert*, as also of *Bilney*, *Friith*, and several others. *Hist. Reform. Vol. 1. Fo. 163. 170.*

I know, this is a remote looking-back for the Matter of Religion, as it now stands in this Island, and some may be forward to ask, what Relation this is likely to have to the present Case of an Union with *Scotland*; but if such will have Patience, till I come gradually thorow the Case, I am mistaken, if I do not fully satisfy their Curiosity, and make the Reason, as well as the Connection, very just, and I hope, useful.

## MISCELLANEA.

Speaking of the Laws made to suppress those Sanctuaries of Thieves, the *Mins* and *Fryers*, I came in my last to note that with the Knaves, the honest, but miserable Debtors were driven to seek Shelter where they could find it, and more than usually expos'd to the Mercy of their Creditors—

To be assunder of these, as might consist with necessary Compassion, and at the same time not to encourage Frauds, several Laws were made to deliver, such as were entirely reduc'd from the Hands of the merciless. —And this will bring me to examine the several Steps taken on both sides in this Work, and how, and by what Means they have all prov'd ineffectual.

Before I enter upon this Work, I am to premise one thing, which will appear generally true, in all the several Circumstances which will now come before me, *Viz.* That the fraudulent Bankrupt having all along reapt the principal Advantage of these merciful Laws, rather than the honest and necessitous distress'd Person, for whom they were made by his hardened Front, running thro' all the Barriers of Oaths and Examination, which can only awe or restrain the Man of Conscience. This Evil has been fatal to the End the Law was design'd for, has brought a general Scandal upon all those Laws; the poor Debtor, who had by the real Design of those Laws a Title to be reliev'd by them, has only been put to a still

greater Expence, out of the little he had left, and by that means brought lower than he was before; the Rogues have got out, and the honest Men are left behind, rather more miserable than they were before.

Such is the Fury of these Sort of People, who prosecute their Debtors in this Manner, that from this Circumstance they take the Liberty of railing at all Laws, contriv'd for the Delivery of these Captives, because they have been abus'd by ill Men; by the same Rule they might complain of the Scriptures, or of Religion in general, because Hypocrites make it the specious Pretence to mask vicious Designs, and deceive the World.

Indeed, I never found these Gentlemen at all forward to contrive a Law, in which an honest, unhappy Man might be deliver'd from merciless Creditors, the Estate secur'd, and the Man preserv'd; I never found any Essay that way come from one of these People, but their whole Business has been to cry down all merciful Laws in general, and to desire to have the Debtor left entirely to the Mercy of his Creditors, which is the very Grievance, the Nation has so long groan'd under, and which I doubt not 'tis easie to make appear, has been more fatal to the Creditor, than it has to the Debtor.

The first Laws in Compassion to Debtors, that I remember, have been such as these; that